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MODRED
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Editor: Bernie Jaye, Art Assistants: Floron Florenzo; Neil Diamond.

CAPTAIN BRITAIN

REBIRTH! P.4
Captain Britain stops aping around and meets
... SATURNYNE! Is she friend or foe? Read
on! ..

THE AVENGERS

NIGHTS OF WUNDAGORE! P.9
Modred reveals to Wanda her sinister destiny!

THE VALIANT ALSO DIE! P.30
Not only does the Red Guardian finally meet
Captain America, but we also learn the awesome
purpose of the Dread Psychotron!!

'INSIDE COMICS'

Interview with Marvel artist John Stokes! .. P.26



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Who are the Avant Guards? Who is "Her Whyness"? And how come they've given Britain the *Ultimate Regression*?
More importantly, what is the way back?! Read on, if you can . . .



ELSEWHERE, IN WHITEHALL'S CORRIDORS OF POWER, WILCOX-SMYTH, THE HOME SECRETARY OF THIS FOREIGN KINGDOM IS EXERCISING HIS JAW MUSCLES...

I DON'T CARE IF HE CALLS HIMSELF KING CHARLES, HE MUST BE FOUND!

MY JOB IS TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER IN THIS GOD-FORSAKEN COUNTRY. I WON'T HAVE ANY TOM, DICK OR HARRY WHO CAN SEW A COSTUME TOGETHER TAKING THE LAW INTO HIS OWN HANDS!

THESE VIGILANTES ARE DANGEROUS. THEY THINK THEY OWN THE LAW. BUT THEY'RE WRONG. ONLY I OWN THE LAW! THAT'S WHY SUPERHEROS WERE BANNED IN THE SIXTIES!

I WON'T HAVE IT. HE MUST BE FOUND- UNDERSTAND? FOUND- AND ELIMINATED! SEND IN - THE STATUS CREW!

IMMEDIATELY SIR!

CLASS: UPPER PRIMATE
VARIANT: DC BLUE
ORIGIN: EARTH GREEN DC ONE
HEIGHT: 130 CM WEIGHT: 40.2 KGS
INCONGRUITIES: PSYCHIC POWERS
INCREASED BN FACTOR 10.3
DIMENSION: SPANNING CAPABILITIES

YOU'RE RATHER CUTE AINCHA?

WHERE'S HOME TO YOU?

JACKDAW WON'T TALK TILL YOU BRING BACK THE CAPTAIN!

THAT MAY BE ARRANGED

THE NAME OF THIS LADY IS SATURNINE

AND SHE WAS POSTED TO THIS HOLE BY THE DIMENSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURT...

NOT TOO FAR AWAY...



A LIQUID ADVANCES

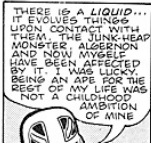
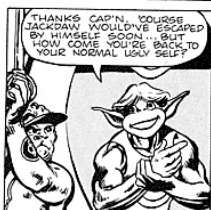


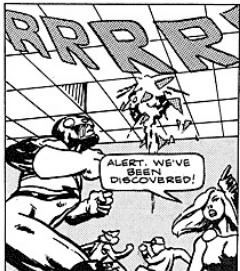
GRADUALLY IT SOAKS INTO THE SUPINE APISH FORM...



... WITH RATHER FORTUNATE RESULTS







THE AVENGERS®

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& STEVEN GRANT
PLOT

DAVID MICHELINIE
WRITER

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DAN GREEN
INKS

JIM NOVAK
LETTERS

ROGER STERN
EDITOR

JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

HIGH ABOVE THE SUN-STREAKED
VILLAGE OF EAST TRANSA, A
TOWERING JINGER OF STONE
JUTS SKYWARD.



IT IS CALLED WUNDAGORE,
AND IT HAS BECKONED
FORTY-TWO JUNGLES
SEEKING ANSWERS OF THEIR
PAST.



ONE, THE
SCARLET WITCH REMAINS UN-
ACCOUNTED FOR AT ITS PEAK--

--WHILE THE OTHER, QUICK-
SILVER, HAS MOST RECENTLY
DISCOVERED A LOWER RIDGE,
AN UNASSUMING COTTAGE...



...AND THAT COTTAGE'S
VERY ASSUMING OCCUPANT.

WH-WHO ARE
YOU? WHAT
HAVE YOU--?

I'VE PROBABLY SAVED
YOUR LIFE, PIETRO. AS
THE ONE WHO BROUGHT
YOU INTO THIS WORLD,
I COULD DO NO LESS.

NOW DRINK THIS
MILK SOUP WHILE
IT'S HOT. YOU'LL
NEED STRENGTH
FOR THE TASKS
AHEAD.



HUSH, CHILD, JUST EAT AND LISTEN. FOR IF ANY OF US ARE TO SURVIVE THIS TIME OF EVIL, YOU MUST KNOW FULLY MY STORY...



--AND YOURS!

"THE TALE BEGINS YEARS AGO, IN THE LABORATORY OF HE WHO WAS TO BE CALLED THE HIGH EVOLUTIONARY. I WAS ONE OF HIS FIRST PROJECTS, A COW WHICH HE EVOLVED TO HUMAN FORM AND NAMED... BOVA!"



"I WAS TO CARE, FOR THE CHILDREN OF HIS NEW MEN, FOR HE HAD MORE PRESSING MATTERS TO TEND TO. MATTERS THAT COINCIDED WITH THE UNEXPECTED RETURN OF HIS ASSISTANT, JONATHAN DREW..."



"... MATTERS THAT KEPT THE TWO MEN OCCUPIED IN THE TALL TOWERS OF WUNDAGORE THE NIGHT WHEN A VISITOR ARRIVED, ASKING SANCUARY: HER NAME WAS MAGDA, A WOMAN HEAVY WITH CHILD..."



--AND SORROW...

"SHE TOLD OF A HUSBAND WHO HAD GAINED STRANGE ABILITIES, POWERS THAT HAD SENT HIM RAVING WITH A DESIRE TO RULE THE WORLD. FEARFUL THAT HIS MADNESS WOULD CORRUPT THE CHILD HE WASN'T EVEN AWARE SHE CARRIED, SHE HAD FLED."



"AND, HAVING HEARD OF WUNDAGORE, SHE SOUGHT ASYLUM HERE... AND WAS GRANTED IT."



"I CARED FOR HER MYSELF, AND OVER THE WEEKS WE BECAME VERY CLOSE."

"SO THAT WHEN THE TIME CAME, A MIDWIFE FOR HER, IT WAS MORE PRIVILEGE THAN DUTY I HELPED TO DELIVER TWIN INFANTS THAT NIGHT... YOU, PIETRO, AND YOUR SISTER, WANDA..."



"--WHOSE TINY FORM MOMENTARILY MIRRORRED THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHTS THAT FILLED THE SKY THE NIGHT YOU WERE BORN..."



"MAGDA WAS PLEASED WITH HER OFFSPRING AND YET IT SEEMED A PLEASURE TINGED WITH RESOLVE, THUS IT CAME AS LITTLE SHOCK WHEN, DAYS LATER..."



"I FOUND HER GONE, LEAVING ONLY A NOTE EXPRESSING FEAR THAT IF SHE REMAINED ALIVE, HER UNNAMED HUSBAND MIGHT FORCE KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR CHILDREN FROM HER."



"I TOOK THE CHILDREN TO MY LORD HIGH EVOLUTIONARY. HE WAS WEARY, AS IF FROM SOME GREAT CONFLICT BUT AGREED TO HELP."



"HE THUS SUMMONED A VISITING COUPLE FROM THE VILLAGE BELOW-- ROBERT AND MADELINE FRANK, WHO WERE THEMSELVES EXPECTING A CHILD. IT WAS MY LORD'S PLAN TO GIVE ALL THREE CHILDREN TO THE FRANKS."



"AND SO, I PERFORMED ONCE MORE AS MIDWIFE. ONLY THIS TIME THE RESULTS WERE TRAGIC. THE CHILD WAS HORRID, DEFORMED AND, THANKFULLY, STILLBORN."



"THE MOTHER SURVIVED THE RIGOURS OF THAT TERRIBLE BIRTH BY ONLY MOMENTS"

"SEEING BUT ONE POSSIBILITY FOR GOOD IN THIS TRAGEDY, I OFFERED MAGDA'S TWINS TO ROBERT FRANK AS HIS OWN. BUT THE DEATH OF HIS WIFE WAS TOO GREAT A BURDEN..."



"...AND HE FLED FROM WUNDAGORE, THE SOBS OF HIS GRIEF CRACKING THE CHILL OF THE DARK BALKAN NIGHT..."



"IT WAS THEN THAT THE HIGH EVOLUTIONARY TOOK A MORE DIRECT HAND. KNOWING OF A TRIBE OF GYPSIES CAMPED NEARBY, HE ORDERED ME TO FETCH THE CHILDREN..."



"...AND THEN, LIKE SOME MANIFESTING GOD, HE PLACED THEM IN THE CARE OF THE TRIBE'S SHAMAN, DJANGO MAXIMOFF AND HIS WIFE, WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO RAISE THE TWINS AS THEIR OWN."



"THE MAXIMOFFS, WHO HAD RECENTLY LOST THEIR OWN CHILDREN -- ANA AND MATEO -- COMPLIED."



AND THAT'S THE LAST I SAW OF YOU UNTIL YOU CAME TUMBLING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN SOME HOURS AGO.

THEN DJANGO IS THE MAN WHO RAISED ME IN MY YOUTH! THE STORY FITS! BUT...

#LAST ISSUE -- ER



...WHY IS IT SO HARD TO REMEMBER? WHY IS MY CHILDHOOD SO CLOUDY?

PERHAPS IT IS THE TRAUMA OF LOSS, MY DEAR. CAUSED BY YOUR BELIEF THAT YOUR FOSTER PARENTS HAD DIED!



"I FELT THE SAME SENSE OF EMPTINESS WHEN WINDGORE LEFT FOR THE STARS, AND I ELECTED TO REMAIN BEHIND FOR... PERSONAL REASONS."

"BUT THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT. WHAT MATTERS IS THAT NOW YOU KNOW ALL."



"ALL"? BUT I STILL HAVEN'T A CLUE AS TO MY TRUE FATHER'S IDENTITY!

THEN TAKE MY WORD THAT YOU KNOW ENOUGH! PLEASE!



THERE IS DANGER HERE
THAT SURPASSES YOUR
COMPREHENSION,
PIETRO!

YOU MUST
TAKE WANDA
AND LEAVE
BEFORE--



WANDA? BUT SHE'S
DISAPPEARED! I
WAS SEARCHING
FOR HER WHEN
I FELL!

THEN I'M
AFRAID, MY
CHILD, THAT
IT MUST
ALREADY BE--

--TOO LATE? QUITE POSSIBLY, FOR EVEN NOW, AMIDST THE
CRATERED RUINS OF WUNDAGORE...



DOETH IT NOT SEEM
PASSING DROLL, MILADY,
THAT I ONCE CONSIDERED
YON TOME, THE DARKHOLD,
TO BE EVIL?

THAT I EVEN
COMBATTED ITS
EFFORTS TO
HOLD SWAY OVER
THE EARTH?



AYE, 'T WAS ONLY
WHEN I CONFRONTED
THE OTHER THAT
I KNEW THE DEMON
OF THE DARKHOLD
TO BE AN AGENT
OF DESTINY--

'T WAS MY LOT
TO HELP HIM
ESTABLISH A
NEW ORDER
O'ER THE
WORLD!



MODRED DOESN'T
REALIZE HE'S BEING
USED AS A PAWN!

AND THAT THE
ENTITY HE
SERVES
COULD EASILY
ANNIHILATE
MANKIND!

NOT THAT HIS OWN POWER IS LACKING. MY MAGIC CAN'T EVEN WEAKEN HIS HOLDING SPELL.



BUT MY MUTANT HEX ABILITIES CAN SIDESTEP MAGIC BY ALTERING PROBABILITIES!



AND, HOPEFULLY, SET... ME...

...FREE!



WHA...? NAY!

FOUL MISCREANT! THOU HAST DEAMED THE SACRED DARKHOLD!



THAT'S NOTHING, MODRED! AS SOON AS I GET TO MY FEET, I'M GOING TO DESTROY IT!

FIE! MAYHAPS THINE LIFE HATH BEEN DEEMED SACROSANCT BY THE MASTER--



-- BUT NAUGHT IN HIS EDICTS FORBIDS THE ADMINISTRATION OF DISCIPLINE!

WRITHE, DEFILER!



WHEW! I BARELY STOPPED MODRED'S MYSTIC BOLTS IN TIME!



BUT I DON'T KNOW
HOW LONG I'LL BE
ABLE TO HOLD THEM
OFF! I THOUGHT MY
COMBINED SCIENTIFIC
AND SORCEROUS
SKILLS WOULD BE A
MATCH FOR
MOORED--

-- BUT HIS
MASTERY OF MAGIC
IS INCREDIBLE!



HAVE TO TAKE THE
DEFENSIVE!
CREATE A HEX
SPHERE TO
REPULSE HIS
ENERGY BOLTS!

THINE RESOURCEFULNESS
DOETH BE ADMIRABLE,
WOMAN--

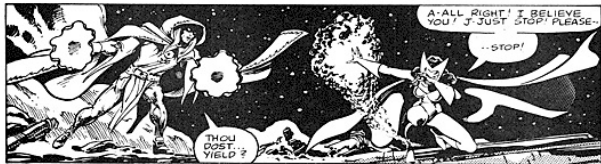


--BUT
IT
SHALL
AVAIL
THE
NAUGHT!



FOR MINE STRENGTH
GOETH BEYOND THAT
OF MERE MASICKS
AND SPELLS--

--TO THE RAGING POWER OF
THE ELEMENTS THEMSELVES!



A-ALL RIGHT! I BELIEVE
YOU! J-JUST STOP! PLEASE--

--STOP!

THOU
DOST...
YIELD?

VERILY, I BE DISAPPOINTED. I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THOU TO BE A MORE DETERMINED OPPONENT.

I AM, MODRED. I JUST REALIZED THAT I CAN'T FIGHT YOU ON YOUR LEVEL, BUT THERE ARE OTHER LEVELS, LIKE, FOR INSTANCE, WHAT THE MORTALS OF THIS WORLD CALL--

--A ROUND-
HOUSE
LEFT!

!HNFF?!?

THW

I... I'VE NEVER KILLED BEFORE, BUT IF THAT MONSTER MODRED SERVES SHOULD PREVAIL, MILLIONS COULD DIE!

GOD FORGIVE ME...

MAYHAPS "HE" SHALL, WITCH, BUT THE DEMON OF THE DARKHOLD--

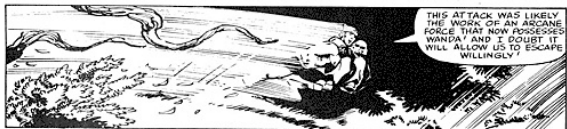
--SHALL NOT!

FOR THOU WERT CHOSEN AT BIRTH TO BE THE VESSEL, WOMAN! TO BE THE INSTRUMENT FOR THE MASTER'S SECOND RISING! AND THE TIME OF THAT RISING--

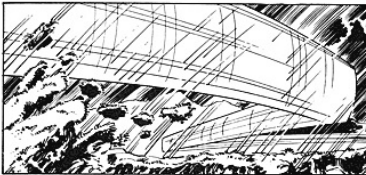
--BE NOW!







THE AWESOME TRUTH OF THAT STATEMENT IS QUICK TO BE MANIFEST, AS THE ONCE-DRY SKY ERUPTS WITH A STORM AS UNNATURAL AS IT IS IMMEDIATE! AND IT IS ONLY THE INHUMAN SPEED OF THE SILVER AVENGER THAT SAVES THE TWO INNOCENTS FROM A DEADLY RAIN OF FIRE, STONE AND WATER--



--AS THEY RACE OVER GROUND THAT CRACKS INTO GAFING CHASMS, AS IF THE VERY EARTH WOULD SWALLOW THEM WHOLE!



THAT'S THE POST OFFICE, MATEO. PERHAPS THEY'LL LET US USE THEIR TELEPHONE. I CERTAINLY HOPE SO.

I-IT'S THE ONLY ONE IN TOWN!



YOU IN THERE! OPEN THE DOOR!



I AM SORRY, MEIN HERZ, BUT WE ARE CLOSED. THE STORM--

PLEASE! I MUST USE YOUR PHONE! I HAVE TO MAKE AN EMERGENCY CALL TO--





QUICKSILVER JUST CALLED, SAYING THAT WANDA HAS BEEN POSSESSED BY SOME PRETERNATURAL POWER -- CAUSING HER TO WREAK ELEMENTAL DESTRUCTION OVER AN AREA OF MILES!



I'M SORRY, CAPTAIN AMERICA, BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE.



WHAT I MEAN IS: (A) QUICKSILVER IS NOT CURRENTLY AN ACTIVE AVENGER--YOU'RE NOT REQUIRED TO ANSWER HIS SUMMONS.



NOW WAIT JUST A MINUTE--!



--AND (C) ANOTHER INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT WE DON'T NEED!



WE'RE STILL TRYING TO PLACATE RUSSIA OVER THAT SHIELD INVASION LAST MONTH AND--



--HEY! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?







NO, YOU OLD FOOL! FOR AT
LAST I'VE PURGED THIS
VESSEL OF ITS LAST TAIN
OF HUMANITY. ITS LAST WISP
OF SOUL! THERE IS NO ANA
MAXIMOFF! THERE IS NO
WANDA FRANK! NOW, THERE
IS ONLY...

...CHTHON!



NEXT
ISSUE: **THE CALL OF THE MOUNTAIN THING!**

'INSIDE COMICS'

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN STOKES

FREELANCE COMIC STRIP ARTIST AND ILLUSTRATOR JOHN STOKES TALKS TO INSIDE COMICS ABOUT HIS LIFE AND WORK IN THE COMICS' INDUSTRY.

I.C. Can you tell me something about your present and previous work in comics?

J.S. The bulk of my work is done with IPC. They must be nearly the first company I worked with. I was with them for about sixteen years, until Dez Skinn got in touch with me to work on the last issue of *House of Hammer of House of Horror*, whatever it was at that time. This led to the tie up with Marvel. These are the only companies I've ever worked with in the eighteen years I've been in this profession.

I.C. How did you come into the comics industry?

J.S. Through my brother I suppose — George Stokes. He was working in the industry when I was at school and like a lot of kids, I guess my first drawings were comics. I used to read and copy comics and until I went to art school nothing else occurred to me. Once at art school, they tried to wean me off comics into a fine art career, but they didn't succeed. George introduced me to various people he was working with, or no longer working with and I drifted into the jobs that he drifted out of.



For an as yet unpublished *Dr Who* story.

I.C. What would you say your major influences were?

J.S. I suppose the first things I saw must have been George's work and people he worked with, like Gary Keane and Syd Jordon. I was in India till I was about eight or nine and didn't see any comics, or graphic work at all. When I came back to England, the *Eagle* was first starting and I used to receive this through the post. Frank Hampson influenced me a lot and I started to collect the Rip Kirby strip from the *Daily Mail*. More recent influences I suppose were Frank Bellamy whom I like very much; a lot of the Marvel America artwork and much of the Warren material.

I.C. Working at IPC and at Marvel Comics, what did you find the differences to be both organizationally and artistically?

J.S. The emphasis, in Marvel particularly, seems to be more to do with contact and co-operation with the writer and the editorial staff. This I didn't get at IPC. IPC was very much a case of getting the script through the post and getting on with it and posting it back. It was very much an isolated thing. Whether that's the system or my fault particularly I don't know. All the time I've been working, I've been working from outside London, so it could be down to the peculiarities of my particular existence.

I.C. What about the differences in artistic style, have you had to adapt your artwork for Marvel Comics?

J.S. Not consciously, in that one of the shortcomings of my stuff is that I've always been terrible eclectic and I've adopted a different style with almost every job I've done. I'm not a great stylist and the sort of things I do don't shriek 'John Stokes' at you. If the job seems to call for a Frank Bellamy style approach I'm able to turn that on.

I.C. How do you feel about working as a freelance artist?



An example of John Stokes inking from the *Time Bandits*.

J.S. I've never been anything else. Ever since I left art school I've never done anything else. It's got its problems. I mean, people are astounded whenever you tell them that you're a freelance illustrator and they say "how marvelous — you work on your own, you can choose when you work"; of course, they forget about the deadlines. It's a lonely sort of existence but I like it — I wouldn't do anything else, I couldn't do anything else now.

I.C. How do you feel about the relationship between artists and writers?

J.S. Until recently I've had so little contact with writers that I can't pronounce on that from experience. In theory it's obviously a good thing. I'd like to have more of it, though I've been very lucky in the writers I've worked with over the years. I did a marathon series with Scott Goodall for IPC without any sort of contact with him. I was just very lucky in that he happened to feed me the sort of stories that I liked doing, but I don't think I've even spoken to him.

I.C. Was that the Fishboy series?

J.S. Fishboy, yes. Also another follow up but that he did, a nature story about a fox cub but as I say, I don't believe I've ever even spoken to him, although we've had something like a five year partnership.

I.C. Was it easy to maintain creative interest in these very long, continuous strips?

J.S. It was in those cases, because they were very firmly based in natural history: fish species and the Devon countryside of the fox story. There was always the spur of having to go back to nature, and that kept me going. I mean, I was really quite sorry when the 360th episode of Fishboy eventually came up and it was time to finish.

I didn't find I went stale. It was amazing looking back, how much my style in work changed totally over the years. The first ones were horrific, they were terribly bad. In a sense I grew up with the strip and it's quite interesting to keep learning on the same story. I've quite enjoyed it.

I.C. What do you feel you are contributing to the comics medium artistically and professionally?

J.S. I don't know quite how to answer that. Until recently I've never ever thought of it in those terms. In all the years I was working with IPC I never met writers, I never met any other artists and so I just felt like a single cell at my little desk. I used to work away post my stuff off and receive precious little come back, except for the occasional kid who wrote to me and said I'd drawn a Wellington Bomber wrong or something.

I thought of it only in terms of doing a craftsman's job. I drew to the best of my ability. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't, but I honestly can say I never thought of it in those terms and it isn't until recently that the thought of being up for an award or being interviewed about the stuff I do has ever occurred to me. I just do as good a job as I'm able and hope that's okay.

I.C. What about the materials you use for your artwork?

J.S. I tend to use an awful lot of pen and ink. I'm a peculiarity in that I'm not very happy with brushes and use a brush very seldom, except for laying in areas of black. I tend to work exclusively with a rather hard pen. This

gives my stuff a rather scratchy and overworked look sometimes. I'm not very fluent with a brush I admit. It's an area I should do more in.

Generally I stick to a Gillotte 404 nib. They tend to become old friends before I have to throw them in the rubbish-bin and break in a new one.

There was a time when I was doing the nature strip that I began to get into creating textures by my thumb prints and splatter and things like that, which was quite nice. It happened to fit in quite well with the story, but generally I'm fairly unadventurous as far as techniques go.

I.C. What about the board that you use?

J.S. I use a fairly fine surfaced paper called Ivorex. I'm not really very fussy about the surface of the board, as long as it takes the ink well and you don't have to beat it to death to get a line.

I.C. Is there any advice you'd like to give to potential comic-strip artists?

J.S. I wouldn't know what to say to them, I don't think. In a sense I've got so much to learn myself still. I mean, every time I come into the office I see other peoples' work and I think "My god, you know this is an area you really have got to polish up on!"

Apart from doing what I do, which is look at everybody I can who's good, and learn what I can from them — I don't know what else you can do except getting in there and doing it. There's no substitute for just getting down and hammering out your own style. You just have to sit in front of a blank sheet of paper and get on with it, there's no other way.

I.C. Okay, that's it.

J.S. Okay.

I.C. Thanks.

Interview conducted by Bernie Jaye.



For an as yet unpublished Dr Who story.

★★ NEWS ★★

Things are on the move at Marvel. We're going to concentrate our mode of attack, so watch out!

Marvel Superheroes and Savage Action merge next issue! Rampage and Blockbuster merge next issue but one! "Oh no!" you all cry, "oh yes!" we answer . . . But don't worry, just relax and listen.

This will leave us with M.S.H.s; Rampage and Conan. Each title will have its own distinctive character.

Our story line-up for Marvel Superheroes will feature UK originated material — Captain Britain and Night-Raven; the New Avengers and a 'Mystery strip Spot' to titillate your curiosity and sense of adventure — suggestions will always be welcome.

Inside Comics will reflect the character of each mag. It will have a greater variety of articles, interviews and reviews, plus current information on the comics scene and a regular talent competition, quiz and lucky dip with prizes galore. The comic Mart has not been forgotten. It will be appearing in Rampage with a whole host of other goodies which I'm not going to tell you about till next month! Conan fans should also watch out!

See you next ish!

Bernie Jaye



BRITAIN LETTERS

All correspondence to: Bernie Jaye, Marvel Comics Ltd.,
Jadwin House, 205-211 Kentish Town Road, London NW5.

Dear Bullpen,

I've waited for Captain Britain to return but this is really Captain Britain. New costume — I'll give you that, heroes do change their costumes sometimes. No staff — bit disappointed about that but at least his suit has got some of its powers. No amulet — I hope it's hidden under his new costume because Caps' amulet was the start of Captain Britain. It symbolised the fight between good and evil. The real Captain should have the amulet.

Artwork — I was surprised how Alan Davis can bring out such good pictures followed by awful ones. Too much of that grey with black dot type shading looks awful in some pictures. Jackdaw doesn't look right either. Best picture — the cover and the picture on page 3, they're great, fabulous.

Script — Well Dave Thorpe, one time reader and letter writer, you wanted Cap. to think about what it means to be Captain Britain, I hope you don't forget this.

In the first issue the story went much too quickly. I realise you don't have many pages but slow down a little. Someone wasn't paying attention, 1st picture Cap is carrying his old staff, surely something's wrong there. Why did Jackdaw's bow vanish?

I hope the strip works out and I wish you all the best but try and watch the funny stuff. A lot of the dialogue seems to be tongue in cheek, especially Jackdaw. Somehow I think you'll need new supporting characters or is Courtney still waiting and is Jacko still at the same place. Surely they must suspect something. Cap. vanishes, so does Brian, for a long time. When Brian comes back so does Cap. I think most people would put two and two together. It will be interesting how you cope with this. A few team-ups might be nice — give Spidey what for.

Once I would of said 'Until the day Cap looses his staff and amulet' but I can't anymore so I'll just say Exelsior and Make Mine Marvel.

Steve Poland,
London SW19.

Dear Bullpen,

For the past few months I had been eagerly anticipating the Captain's return but after reading M.S. 377 my hopes began to sink and after 378 they hit rock bottom. Why, you ask? Here are my reasons:

1st, the length. I, among others had thought a monthly would mean a higher page count than the weekly. The first had only six pages while the 2nd episode had merely four! The original Captain Britain had seven a week, making a total of twenty-eight. While I am not saying you should have this many we could have at least ten. If the Americans can do it, we can!

2nd, the plot. Dave, after having written a letter (in CB 17) explaining what you would like done with the strip, why haven't you done it? Instead of giving C.B. a supporting cast, somewhere to live, and a job, we have a completely senseless plot line which will have no lasting effect on our characters. You could've sent CB to London or somewhere, set a firm plotline round CB and one of his old villains (complete with sub-plots) and introduced his supporting cast that way.



Thirdly, Jackdaw. Whoever thought of this poor excuse for R2D2 should be thrown down the nearest blackhole along with the half elf. So far all he has done is jumped on someone's shoulders and got drunk. If there is any point to him could someone please tell me what?

In fact, the only reason I continue to read this strip is because of the art. Alan Davis is a refreshing change from Herb Trimpe and Ron Wilson, and has really given CB a British look.

There is great potential for CB which has so far been wasted by all the writers on the strip. C'mon Mr Thorpe show us that you can write a good story (or if you can't alternatively I could continue the script (I don't charge much) No? Ah well, it was worth a try) Make Mine Marvel! P.S. Time Smasher, has great promise.

Timothy Nelson,
Essex.



Dear Marvel,

This summer we, the readers, took a farewell look at the old Captain Britain when he teamed up with Spider-Man in the *Captain Britain Summer Special*. The strip was above average for CB and it left you wondering what would have happened if this standard of scripting had continued; but alas it did not and the scripting reins of CB are now in the hands of Marvel UK, or more precisely Dave Thorpe. Looking at the team-up you can see where many of the American writers went wrong. For example we only saw three pages with Brian Braddock and the rest was devoted to CB, Spidey or both, which just shows how little time was spent by many writers developing the character of CB's alter-ego. And even though it was a team-up, it was left to Spidey to destroy Arcade's Murder World, leaving CB out in the cold playing second fiddle to the bigger star. Let's face it under American authorship CB went nowhere but now he has returned from Otherworld to fight again, this time in the hands of a British writer.

He has returned in MSH issue 377. The cover of the mag was brilliant and even though I had seen the ads with the cover on them, I was in no way prepared for Alan Davis' use of colour. Without a doubt the new costume is far, far better and more British than the original, which was too English (especially with the red costume and the gold rampant lion). He is now, without doubt, Captain Britain.

As T. Jamieson said, Alan Davis has a difficult job in trying to do as well as or better than all the artists that have gone before him. However, he need have no fears about readers criticizing his work — it is at least as good as any other work on CB and better than some. His CB cover was a landmark and even the picture on the contents page was good. The only disappointment was that there was no splash

page at the beginning of the story but this will no doubt be corrected in future issues.

Upon looking at the cover again I see the phrase "Flying Again..."! At first I thought this was a metaphor meaning that CB was back but upon reading the story I found out that CB can now fly. This was one of the new ideas from Dave Thorpe, CB's latest writer. His idea of incorporating the powers of the sceptre into CB's costume or even body was brilliant and it gets rid of what was one of CB's weak links. It goes without saying that Dave has a difficult job in trying to revive a dead strip but his creation of the Crazy Gang promises much to come. They are an unusual team and are still a mystery but he didn't have much space to explain anything more in only 6 pages. This left the reader with more questions than answers — why are the 50p coins round...? Why does Britain have a Nazi party with a Hitler look alike as its head...? Hopefully he will answer these questions in the next episode called "Outcasts".

I have but two requests. The first is to get rid of Jackdaw and the second is to increase the length of strip per issue. Six pages are too few. Each segment should be at least 7 or 8 pages long.

Gordon J. Milne,
Aberdeen.



REPLY by DAVE THORPE (writer)

Alan Davis and I thank you for all your carefully considered criticisms, comments and plaudits; it's good to know that so many readers care about the future of England's No. 1 superhero.

The main criticism is that of space; we would love to have more pages a month, but it doesn't seem to be possible at the moment. Given that we are cramped, it's true that we don't have so much room for obvious character development.

However, one should be able to get the best out of every situation and the limitation is a good discipline. It encourages us to do something

different from what the Americans do with their super-heroes, and 22 pages. And of necessity it makes everything we do controversial because it's not what the readers expect.

This is obvious from the way several letter-writers berate me for apparently not doing with CB what I said I would do five years ago.

Two points here; firstly I'm not the same person I was then. Secondly, I think these people are looking for the wrong things.

One of the high points for me of Marvel in the 70s was Steve Engelhart's stint on Captain America, where he made Cap question his role in an America riddled by corruption. If you expect something like that kind of treatment with Captain Britain, you're going to be looking the wrong way.

Yes, we're going to explore all those issues, but as an integral part of the action in the storyline, using the themes inherent in the support characters situation. The alternative England that Cap's in now can be seen as allegorical to ours. It is a nightmare authoritarian society. This extremity allows us to throw the status of Captain Britain into sharp relief.

Thus, the second story was called 'Outcasts', and explored three types of outcast. The continuing theme is of development, both pragmatic and spiritual, away from this negative backdrop. The Junkheap monster was an example of misguided development. Saturnyne presents another example, hopefully more sane.

One cannot have a concept of 'patriot' without one of 'Traitor'. The current story explores the double-sided nature of this concept; to be loyal to one thing you have to be traitor to another. Soon, Captain Britain will return to our earth. Merlyn's plan will be apparent.

But before he does, he will have time to place in perspective all the things that have just happened to him to prepare him for his homecoming.

As for Jackdaw, he's going to be popping in and out for a while yet. He's great! His sense of fun offsets CB's seriousness. The same applies to the comic elements. These and the action, are all part of the entertainment. You don't need to have lots of serious captions, heavy thought balloons all the time to give characters depth.

I'd say certain American comic writers do this far too much and achieve the opposite effect. Character and destiny are intertwined; the one grows out of the other. To let this happen by itself is our aim. To tell us we're whether succeeding or not, is up to you.

THE AVENGERS

"THE VALIANT ALSO DIE!"

HAH! TO THINK THAT ONE OF THE ACCURSED AVENGERS SHOULD BE CAPTURED IN MY VERY STRONGHOLD. LURED HERE BY HIS LOVE FOR THE BLACK WIDOW!

WHAT COULD BETTER PROVE HOW SUPERIOR TO ALL AMERICANS IS THE ONE THEY CALL... THE RED GUARDIAN!!

AND A KOTSKY-TROTSKY TO YOU, YOU LONG-WINDED CREEP!

JUST LET ME OUTTA THIS OVER-GROWN TEST-TUBE FOR FIVE MINUTES, AND I'LL RAM ALL YOUR SLOGANS DOWN THAT MUSCLE-BOUND THROAT!

HAWKEYE... NO! IT WILL DO NO GOOD TO BAIT HIM!

IT'S NO USE! HE SEEMS WICKED TO SEE OR HEAR ME... SINCE HE LEARNED THAT THE RED GUARDIAN IS MY HUSBAND!

E Pluribus Marvel!

BE IT HEREBY KNOWN TO ALL TRUE BELIEVERS THAT THE TITANIC TEAM OF
Stan Lee (editor)
Roy Thomas (writer)
and

John Buscema

-- (artist)

HAVE CO-CREATED YET ANOTHER MIND-BENDING MODERN MASTERPIECE!

-- SIGNED--

Vince Colletta

(INKER)

Sam Root

(LETTERER)

OKAY, SO WE SIGNED THE THING. ALREADY! NOW CAN YOU HAVE OUR PSYCHECKS?
... VINCE and SAM

AND A MIGHTY MARVEL NO-PRIZE TO US FOR STARTING OUR TALE WITHOUT THE USUAL SPACE-HOGGING SYNOPSIS! THE FAR-OUT PHANTASMAGORIA WHICH FOLLOWS CAN SPEAK FOR ITSELF..





AN IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY, AS I WILL BE THE FIRST TO ADMIT, BUT, I'M STILL UNCONVINCED AS TO ITS MILITARY VALUE!

ALSO, I SHALL NOT REST UNTIL I BEHOLD YOUR PRECIOUS RED GUARDIAN IN ACTION AGAINST THE HATED CAPTAIN AMERICA!

THAT IS ALSO MY OWN FINEST WISH, GENERAL BRUSHOV!

YOU AND OUR DISTINGUISHED GUEST ARE BOTH SHORT OF SIGHT, ALEXI!

WHAT MATTERS A HOLLOW VICTORY OVER ONE LONE MAN... WHEN, WITH THE PSYCHOTRON, WE CAN CONQUER A WORLD!!

"RIGHT NOW, THE POWERS OF THE PSYCHOTRON ARE LIMITED TO A SINGLE CHAMBER. BUT, SOON...VERY SOON...WE SHALL BE ABLE TO PROJECT IMAGES OF WHATEVER WE DESIRE INTO THE VERY HEARTLAND OF THE ENEMY..."



A TIDAL WAVE... HUNDREDS OF FEET HIGH... RISING OUT OF NOWHERE!!

BUT, WE'RE MILES FROM THE SEA! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!!

NOTHING CAN STOP THAT THING! WE'RE DOOMED... DOOMED!

"**TERRIFIED... HELPLESS** BEFORE VISIONS OF FIRE, OF FLOODS OF MECHANIZED WAR-MACHINES TALLER THAN BUILDINGS... BOTH CITIZENRY AND MILITARY ALIKE WILL **FLEE** IN STARK PANIC..."



"THEN, USING OUR NEWEST AND MOST DEADLY WEAPONS, IT WILL TAKE MERELY A SMALL, HAND-PICKED FORCE IN EACH COUNTRY TO TAKE **POSSESSION** OF IT AND ITS VIRTUALLY UNDAMAGED **RESOURCES**..."



"**THINK OF IT!** AN ENTIRE WORLD SHALL BE OURS... WITHOUT THE INCALCULABLE HAZARDS OF **NUCLEAR WAR!**"

A FEW TONS OF SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT, PLACED ON YOUR NATION'S **ATOMIC SUBMARINES**, AND THIS PLANET SHALL BE **OURS!**

AH YES... OUR **ATOMIC SUBMARINES!** PERHAPS YOUR NEED FOR THEM IS THE ONLY REASON YOU HAVE INFORMED US OF THE **PSYCHOTRON**. EH?

I ASSURE YOU, COMRADE GENERAL...

NEVER MIND! THERE IS STILL ONE THING THAT MAKES ME **SKETCHY** OF YOUR MASTERFUL PLAN, COLONEL...

FOR, WHAT OF **MADAME NATASHA**... SHE WHO WAS EXPOSED EARLIER TO THE **FUL** OF THE **PSYCHOTRON**... YET WAS NOT REDUCED TO THE **STARK HELPLESSNESS** WHICH YOU PREDICTED?

I ADMIT, COMRADE, THAT WE MUST DO FURTHER **STUDY** ON HER... TO LEARN WHY THE TRAITOR STILL POSSESSED ENOUGH STRENGTH OF WILL TO ATTEMPT AN **ESCAPE!**

PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE... I AM NOT A TRAITOR... MY COLONEL...

QUIET, FEMALE! YOUR GUILT IS PROVEN!

BY WHOM COLONEL? BY A SNEAKING INFORMER FROM WITHIN SHIELD?

I INSIST YOU SUBJECT THE BLACK WIDOW TO A **LIE-DETECTOR TEST!**

* IT HAPPENED IN 15H
379-----ED.

EAGER TO GAIN HIS GUEST'S GOOD WILL... TO SAY NOTHING OF HIS A-SUB FLEET... THE BASE COMMANDER CALLS FOR AN ADVANCED POLYGRAPH, ONLY TO FIND...

IT IS BEYOND BELIEF!

THE MACHINE SAYS SHE SPEAKS THE TRUTH WHEN SHE DENIES BEING A TRAITOR... THAT SHE IS LOYAL TO OUR NATIONS!

HAVE I NOT ALWAYS CLAIMED SO?

THEN, SHE MUST BE FREED... AT ONCE!

THUS, SCANT MOMENTS LATER... NOW, COLONEL, PERHAPS YOU WILL WISH TO LOOK AT THE AMERICAN SUB-PLANS I STOLE!

I SENSED FROM THE START, MY BELOVED NATASHA, THAT YOU WOULD NEVER TRULY BETRAY US!

THOUGH I TAUNTED YOU BEFORE, NOW ONCE AGAIN WILL I BE HAPPY TO SEE YOU... MY WIFE!

VERY TOUCHING! BUT, YOU MENTIONED 'SUBMARINE PLANS'...

WE TOOK THEM FROM HER WHEN SHE ARRIVED, COMRADE...

WE WERE INFORMED THAT THEY WERE OBSOLETE! BUT NOW, WE SHALL EXAMINE THEM CLOSELY... ALL OF US!

COLONEL LING STILL DOES NOT FULLY TRUST ME! BUT, HE WILL SOON LEARN JUST HOW TRULY I SPOKE!

AH, WHAT A TEAM WE SHALL MAKE WITH OUR PRESENT POWERS, NATASHA... THE INVINCIBLE RED GUARDIAN AND THE BEAUTIFUL BLACK WIDOW!

MY ONLY REGRET WILL BE IF I AM DENIED THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE MYSELF IN COMBAT AGAINST CAPTAIN AMERICA!

AND, AS THE INCONGRUOUS FOURSOME DEPART...

TALK ABOUT BEIN' MIXED UP! I GOT MYSELF CAPTURED BECAUSE I THOUGHT NATASHA WAS ON OUR SIDE! BUT NOW...

NO! I WON'T EVEN THINK IT! I'VE GOT TO TRUST HER... I'VE GOT TO!

EITHER WAY, THOUGH IT LOOKS LIKE CURTAINS FOR HAWKEYE! I JUST HOPE THAT THE OTHER AVENGERS STAY OUTTA THIS!

BUT, UNKNOWN TO THE ARCHER, HE IS TO BE DENIED HIS FONDEST WISH... AND THE RED GUARDIAN TO RECEIVE HIS... FOR...

WELL, THAT MUST BE THE PLACE, CAP! AT LEAST, ACCORDING TO OUR INSTRUMENTS!

BUT, HAWKEYE DIDN'T WANT US TO FOLLOW HIM! SO WHY DID HE ACTIVATE THE HOMING SIGNAL THAT LED US HERE?

MAYBE IT WAS HERCULES WHO DID IT, HANK!

JAN COULD BE RIGHT, GOLIATH! YET, SOMEHOW...

OH WELL, WE'LL WORRY ABOUT SUCH ACADEMIC POINTS LATER! RIGHT NOW, I'M TAKING THIS SUPER-SONIC KIDDEY-CAR IN FOR A LANDING!

THEN, WITH FLAWLESS PRECISION, STEVE ROGERS GUIDES THE AERO-CAR DOWN INTO THE CENTRE OF THE FUTURISTIC COMPLEX...



WHOEVER BUILT THIS BASE IS BOUND TO BE AWARE OF US BY RADAR!

SO NO USE WASTING TIME WITH A SNEAK ATTACK!

JUST THE SAME, I WONDER WHY THEY LET US LAND IN THE FIRST PLACE!

YET, IF THE ONE CALLED **GOLIATH** COULD ONLY PEER MOMENTARILY BENEATH THE VERY SPOT ON WHICH HE STANDS, HE WOULD SOON HAVE HIS ANSWER...



THE BLASTER-CANNON IS IN READINESS!

AND, OUR VISITORS ARE INDEED THE MIGHTY AVENGERS...AS OUR COLONEL PREDICTED!

BEGIN THE ATTACK... NOW!!

THE NEXT INSTANT...



THAT SECTION OF THE SURFACE IS OPENING... POWERED BY SOME NAAMOTH MECHANISM!

IT'S JUST AS WE SUSPECTED! WE'VE WALKED INTO SOME SORT OF TRAP!

BUT, WHEN THOSE CAUGHT IN THE TRAP ARE AVENGERS, THE HUNTERS HAVE A WAY OF BECOMING THE HUNTED!

WAIT! SOME THINGS RISING FROM BELOW...

LOOK OUT! IT'S SOME KIND OF FANTASTIC, LETHAL CANNON!



GET BACK.. IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIVES!

AND, EVEN AS THE COLORFUL QUINTET DUCK BEHIND A NEARBY CORNER...



GOOD SHOW, CAP! ANOTHER SECOND, AND THOSE SLABS WOULD HAVE COME DOWN ON US!

ALL OF WHICH GIVES ME A GREAT IDEA!

WANDA, I THINK IT'S HIGH TIME YOU USED YOUR HEX POWER AGAIN!



AND, WHEN THE GARGANTUAN HANK PYM JOINS HIS FELLOW ASSEMBLERS IN COMBAT, THE TITANIC TABLEAU IS COMPLETE...



THEN, AS SEVERAL PAIRS OF EYES ARE AVERTED UPWARD, A GIGANTIC PANEL OPENS ON ONE OF THE TOWERING SPIRES WHICH OVERLOOK THE PITCHED BATTLE BELOW...



YET, EVEN AS THE STAR-SPANGLED AVENGER SPEAKS, THE GIRL THEY CALL THE WONDERFUL WASP IS TAKING CARE OF MUCH MORE THAN MERELY HERSELF...



IT MISSED! BUT, IF PIETRO'S WARNING HAD COME AN INSTANT LATER...



WAIT... I HAVE FOUND THE PROBLEM! ONE OF THE VITAL WIRES HAS SOMEHOW BEEN PULLED LOOSE!



BY ALL MEANS, COMRADE...
LOOK!

BUT, IF YOU EXPECT
ME TO EXPLAIN HOW
I GOT UP HERE,
FIFTY FEET OFF THE
GROUND... FORGET
IT!

'CAUSE, IF I TOLD
YOU I MADE MYSELF
SMALL ENOUGH TO
RIDE A FLYING ANT...
YOU PROBABLY WOULDN'T
BELIEVE ME!

WE MAY BE MAKING
A LOT OF WORK FOR
A CLEAN-UP
CREW...

STILL, WE'RE NO CLOSER TO
FINDING HAWKEYE AND
HERCULES! TELL THE OTHERS
TO HOLD OUR HOSTS BACK...
WHILE I SEARCH OUT THE
WEAK SPOT IN THIS
SET-UP!

I WILL,
STEVE! BE
CAREFUL!

THERE ARE
UNPREMEDITATED
DANGERS
IN THIS PLACE!

DON'T WORRY
ABOUT ME, LADY!
JUST TAKE CARE
OF YOURSELF!

AND, AS THE RED-WHITE-AND-BLUE AVENGER RACES OFF...

BEHOLD! CAPTAIN AMERICA FLEES!
HAS HE PERHAPS SEEN US, SNORING
DOWNWARD FROM ABOVE?

IF HE DID, HIS
FLIGHT WILL SAVE
HIM, BUT A
MOMENT FROM
OUR PORTABLE
STUN-BEAMS!

NO! AIM FIRST
FOR THE
FEMALES!
THEY MAKE
THE EASIEST
TARGETS!

THEN, AT THE LAST SECOND, GOLIATH SEES THE JET-
POWERED TROOPS TAKING AIM FROM OVERHEAD, AND...

I GOT TO
SAVE THE
GIRLS...!

UNNNNN!

HANK!
OH, HANK,
IF THEY'VE
HARMED
YOU...

BUT, BEFORE THE GLOATING ROCKETEERS CAN FIRE AGAIN
AT THE FALLING GIANT, A FAST-MOVING GREEN COMET
PROVIDES A SUDDEN DISTRACTION...

I DID IT! I REASONED THAT
THEY WOULD NOT BE ABLE
TO REST A MOVING
TARGET!

MUST REMEMBER
TO MOVE MORE
SLOWLY THAN
USUAL... JUST
FAST ENOUGH TO
KEEP THEIR STUN-
RAYS FROM
HITTING ME!

HOWEVER, THE FOREMOST OF THE FLYING DEFENDERS CARRIES OUT HIS ORIGINAL PLAN TO ATTACK CAPTAIN AMERICA, JUST AS...

EVEN YOUR FAR-FAMED SHIELD WILL NOT SAVE YOU FOREVER, FOOL!

EZAK!

WHO NEEDS FOR-
EVER? ALL I
WANT IS A
CHANCE TO
FLING IT AT
YOU, AND...

WH...? THE
SLAB
BENEATH
ME...SLIDING
AWAY!!

NO WAY
TO REGAIN
MY BALANCE!
I'M FALLING...

UHHH!! BUT NOT
FOR LONG!

I'VE STRUCK
SOME SORT OF
METAL PLATFORM...
ENCASED IN A
TRANSPARENT
MATERIAL!

THOP!

AND IT'S BEING
LOWERED
EVEN AS I HIT
IT!

IF I DIDN'T KNOW
BETTER, I'D SAY THIS
WAS A BAMBOO-CURTAIN
WELCOME MAT!

FOR SEVERAL LONG, LINGERING MOMENTS... EACH OF WHICH SEEMS A VERITABLE ETERNITY... THE STUNNED AVENGER SEEKS TO GATHER HIS CHAOTIC SENSES! THEN, ABRUPTLY, THE PLATFORM ENTERS A CHAMBER FILLED WITH THROBBING LIGHT...

WELL, I MAY NOT HAVE FOUND OUR WANDERING AVENGERS JUST YET... BUT THERE'S NATASHA, ANYWAY!

ALL... THE MUCH-LAUDED CAPTAIN AMERICA... OUR PRISONER! I AM GLAD WE DID NOT DESTROY THAT SHIP IN FLIGHT!

NOW COLONEL... I WOULD SEE HIM FIGHT THE RED GUARDIAN!

NO... IT MUST NOT BE! IT WOULD BE INSANITY TO TAKE THE RISK!!

DON'T KNOW WHO THE THREE JOKERS WITH HER ARE... BUT IT'S A CINCINCH THEY'RE NOT MEMBERS OF MY FAN CLUB!

OH, STEVE, STEVE... ARE YOU AND THE OTHER AVENGERS DOOMED... ALL BECAUSE OF ME?

DON'T PUT YOURSELF OUT ON MY BEHALF, FELLA...

NOW, JUST HAND OVER MY TWO BUDDIES... AND NATASHA... AND I'LL HEAD BACK TO THE STATES!

AFTER ALL, YOU DIDN'T THINK THIS PLASTIGLASS WAS HARDER THAN MY SHIELD, DID YOU?

KRASH!

HE'S ESCAPED... BECAUSE YOU DID NOT LET ME KILL HIM OUTRIGHT!

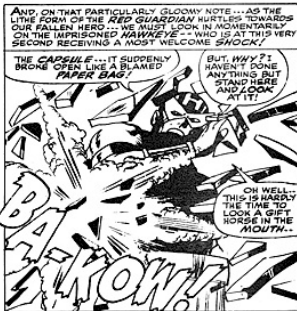
STOP HIM, ALEXI... OR PAY THE ULTIMATE PRICE!

NO THREATS ARE NEEDED, MY COLONEL, TO SPUR THE RED GUARDIAN TO ACTION!

RISK, DO YOU SAY? MY VICTORY IS A CERTAINTY! RELEASE HIM... SO THAT I CAN FULFILL MY DESTINY!







AND, AT THAT PRECISE INSTANT, THE TIDE IS ALSO TURNING IN ANOTHER HARD-FOUGHT STRUGGLE...

YOU'RE GOOD, FELLA... REAL GOOD! BUT, THERE'S ONE THING I'VE GOT THAT YOU HAVEN'T...

UUNHHH...



BUT, IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE, CAPTAIN AMERICA HAS HAD NO TIME TO CONSIDER THE RED GUARDIAN'S TWO WATCHING SUPERIORS! AND, THAT IS ABOUT TO PROVE A FATEFUL SHORTCOMING...

IS THIS THE BEST YOUR CHAMPION CAN DO, LING?

HE REELS BACKWARD... STAGGERED BY THE BLOW OF THE ONE HE WAS CREATED TO DEFEAT!

IT MATTERS NOT, COMRADE GENERAL!

FOR, WITH A TOUCH OF THIS BUTTON... VICTORY IS OURS!



YET, EVEN AS THE UNCONSCIOUS FORM OF THE RED-WHITE-AND-BLUE AVENGER SLUMPS TO THE FLOOR, AN ANGRY VOICE RESOUNDS THROUGH THE CHAMBER...

NO! YOU CANNOT DEFEAT HIM SO UNFAIRLY!

DO YOU THINK THAT YOU ALLOW CAPTAIN AMERICA TO BE SUCH A WEAKLING... THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO CONTINUE THE FIGHT?

I WISH... I DEMAND... THAT YOU ALLOW CAPTAIN AMERICA TO REVIVE... SO THAT I MAY BEST HIM IN EQUAL HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT!



AND INDEED THE FOLLOWING SECOND...

OHHHH... I'M STANDING... ON SOME SORT OF ELECTRICAL GRID!

SHOCK WAVES RUNNING THROUGH ME, SETTING MY BRAIN AFIRE...



FOOL! DO YOU IMAGINE THAT WE ARE HERE MERELY TO PLAY GAMES... THAT THE DESTINED MASTERS OF THE WORLD MUST CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH FAIR PLAY?

CURB YOUR TONGUE, LEST YOU FEEL OUR WRATH! I-- WAIT!

THE BLACK WIDOW... SHE WAS BESIDE ME BUT A MOMENT AGO! WHERE...?



AND, AS THE STARTLED EYES OF COLONEL LING TURN UPWARD, HE BEHOLDS...



THIS MAY BE MY ONE CHANCE TO FULFILL THE MISSION FOR WHICH I HAVE RISKED ALL... TO SABOTAGE THE DREADED PSYCHOTRON!

BUT, ONLY A SLIGHT CHARGE YET REMAINS IN MY RESTORED WIDOW'S BITES!

COLONEL LING SAID THE NERVE CENTRE OF THE MACHINE IS ABOVE! I MUST HOPE ONE BLAST CAN DESTROY IT!

LUCKILY, THEY LET ME RETAIN MY SUCTION BOOTS!

SO...THE BLACK WIDOW SOMEHOW DECEIVED THE LIE-DETECTOR!

THUS, I FIND HER GUILTY OF TREASON AND SENTENCE HER TO... DEATH...

STOP! YOU MUST NOT KILL THE WOMAN! I LO...

MUST CHANCE A SHOT... NOW!!

OHNNH!!

ZAP!!



KRAK!!

THEN, AS THE MORTALLY WOUNDED RED GUARDIAN FALLS, A GUN IS ONCE MORE LEVELLED AT MADAME NATASHA...



BUT, THE NEXT MOMENT FROM OUT OF NOWHERE COMES A SPEEDING SHAF!

WHAM!

SOMETHING STRUCK ME FROM BEHIND...

BRAM!

EMMMFF!!

YET, IT WAS TOO LATE! THE BLACK WIDOW IS DOOMED!!



I'M HIT... FALLING!

IF ONLY MY SINGLE BLAST... ACCOMPLISHED ITS PURPOSE...

I'VE GOT TO BREAK TASHA'S FALL! I'VE GOT TO!!

IF THOSE RATS HAVE KILLED HER, THEY'LL PAY FOR IT! I SWEAR THEY WILL.

BUT, ABRUPTLY, ALL THOUGHTS OF PERSONAL VENGEANCE ARE FORGOTTEN... AS A POWERFUL, ALMOST-FORGOTTEN FORM BURSTS THROUGH SEVERAL INCHES OF TEMPERED STEEL...



THE INDESTRUCTIBLE NYDRA HATH SUDDENLY FAPED FROM VIEW!

LEH ROOM!!

THEN, 'T WAS BUT SOME TRICKERY... AN ILLUSION... AS I DID SUSPECT!

I AM FREE! YET, FROM WHENCE THE FLAMES THAT I SEE BEFORE ME? ARE THEY TOO A MIRAGE?



I WISH THEY WERE, WHISKERS!

CAP, OVER THERE, LOOKS LIKE HE'S JUST STUNNED! HOIST HIM OVER YOUR SHOULDER AND LET'S GO!

THIS ISN'T EXACTLY THE TIME FOR DETAILS, BUT OUR HOSTS LITTLE PORGUN MUSTA HIT SOMETHIN' FLAMMABLE!

WHAT OF THE BLACK WIDOW... SHE WHOM WE DID COME HERE TO RESCUE? SHE DOEN SEEM GO LIFELESS...

SHE'S STILL BREATHIN'! BUT, IF WE DON'T GET OUTTA HERE FAST...

THAT SEEMS TO BE ALL THE ENCOURAGEMENT THE SON OF ZEUS REQUIRES, FOR...

WHOOON!

SINCE ALL PATHS AROUND US ARE BARRED...

...I WOULD APPEAR THAT OUR SOLE PATH TO SAFETY IS THROUGH 'ON CEILING'!

JUST THEN, DIRECTLY ABOVE AS THE REMAINING AVENGERS SEARCH FOR SOME SIGN OF THEIR MISSING COMPANIONS...

LOOK! SOME HUGE PIECE OF MACHINERY... COMING THROUGH THE VERY METAL!

WHO BUT HERCULES COULD HAVE HURLED IT WITH SUCH FORCE? HE... AND PERHAPS THE OTHERS... MUST BE DOWN THERE!

I'LL GET A ROPE READY... IN CASE IT'S NEEDED!

I'VE GOT A HUNCH HE WOULD BE TOSsing THINGS AROUND JUST FOR SHOW!

AND SO, WITHIN SECONDS, THE VITAL LINE IS LOWERED.

O.K.A.Y. M.A.N.-MOUNTAIN! PULL ME UP... AND DON'T STOP TO BREATHE!

THIS PLACE IS TURNING INTO AN OVEN... WITH CAP AND HERK STILL BELOW!

HOWEVER, AS THE LIFE-SAVING ROPE IS DROPPED A SECOND TIME...

AS SOON AS STEVE ROGERS REISTS SECURELY IN THE AERO-CAR THE LION OF OLYMPIUS MUST RETURN TO THIS BLAZING INFERNO... TO SAVE OUR FOES!

NO MATTER HOW HORRENDOUS THEIR CRIMES, THEY CANNOT BE LEFT TO DIE!

THE ONE CALLED HERCULES... HE IS ESCAPING... WITH CAPTAIN AMERICA!

THAT AMERICAN FOOL... MORE THAN ANY OTHER... HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION THAT NOW SURROUNDS ME!

WHATEVER ELSE MAY BEFALL... EVEN THOUGH THE PSYCHOTRON ITSELF BE REDUCED TO FLAMING ASHES...

...CAPTAIN AMERICA MUST BE DESTROYED!!

BUT THEN, JUST AS THE FATAL TRIGGER IS SQUEEZED...

NEVER, ACCUSED ONE... NOT TILL THE HEAVENS CRUMBLE...

HE... AND THE WOMAN I HAVE WRONGED... MUST LIVE, EVEN THOUGH WE DIE!

...SHALL CAPTAIN AMERICA BE KILLED BY ONE SO CRAVEN AS YOU!

WATCH OUT, SWINE! THE LASER BEAM IS GOING WILD...!

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT SEEMS A MADDENED NIGHTMARE... OR ELSE THE FOREDESTINED PLAN OF SOME INSCRUTABLE FATE... AS THE FLAILING LASER BEAM RIPS THROUGH A NEARBY WALL, STRIKING A SERIES OF UNDERGROUND GAS PIPES...



THE NEXT MOMENT, THE VERY EARTH ITSELF SEEMS TO LASH OUT IN A PARONYM OF RAGING FURY, SPEWING FORTH ANCIENT STORIES OF MOLTEN LAVA INTO THE CHAMBER WHICH, SECONDS BEFORE, HAD HOUSED THE PSYCHOTRON...



THEN, AS THE REMAINING TROOPS SCURRY DESPERATELY FOR SAFETY, WRITHING STREAMS FLOW THROUGH THE ENTIRE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE GIGANTIC SUBTERRANEAN BASE, BURNING ALL IN THEIR RELENTLESS PATH...



AND, IN THE ALMOST NOISELESSLY CIRCLING AERO-CAR ABOVE, THE MIGHTY AVENGERS ARE ASKING THEMSELVES THE SAME INEVITABLE QUESTION...



LET'S SAVE THE ARM-CHAIR PHILOSOPHY FOR LATER! THE GUY WHO HANDED US OUR SHINY LITTLE VICTORY IS HURT... MAYBE DYING. GET THIS CRATE MOVIN'!

AT LEAST... I DID WHAT I HAD TO DO-- DESTROYING THE PSYCHOTRON AND SECRETLY LEADING THE AVENGERS HERE!

WHAT DOES ONE LIFE MATTER, MY DARLING... IF THE WORLD IS SAFE?

ONE LIFE ALWAYS MATTERS, TASHA! THAT'S WHAT YOU FOUGHT FOR!

BESIDES, IT MATTERS... TO ME!

MEANWHILE, AS QUICKSILVER VEERS HOMEWARD, A WEARY FIGURE SITS APART... LOST IN HIS OWN SOMBRE THOUGHTS...

FROM WHAT I'VE PIECED TOGETHER, I GAVE MY LIFE TO... THE RED GUARDIAN!

STRANGE... WE WERE BORN ONLY TO CLASH... YET THERE WAS AN INVISIBLE BOND BETWEEN US!

WE FOUGHT ON DIFFERENT SIDES... BUT EACH BY HIS OWN CODE!

AND, FOR THAT CODE THE MAN NAMED ALEXI WAS WILLING TO DIE!

BUT SOON, AS THE SUPERSONIC CRAFT REACHES HAWAII... AND THE WOUNDED BLACK WIDOW IS RUSHED TO THE NEAREST HOSPITAL... ALL THOUGHTS ARE FORGOTTEN. SAVE THOSE OF HER THEY ONCE BELIEVED A TRAITOR...

YOU'VE GOT TO TELL ME, DOC! IS... IS THERE A CHANCE...?

I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW, SON! THE FIRST AID YOU GAVE HER HELPED... BUT, NOW SHE'S LAPPED INTO A STATE OF SHOCK!

ALL WE CAN DO IS TRY! AND, ALL YOU CAN DO... IS PRAY!

THEN, AS THE QUIET, COURAGEOUS GIRL IS WHEELED INTO THE OPERATING ROOM... AND LOST FROM VIEW...

WHAT GOOD IS MY SKILL WITH ARROWS... WHEN THEY CAN'T HELP THE ONE PERSON WHO MATTERS MOST TO ME?

I... THINK I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL, PARTNER!

IF I SHOULD LOSE HER NOW... JUST WHEN I'VE REALLY FOUND HER...

BUT NEVER ABANDON HOPE... NO MATTER HOW SLIM IT MAY BE!

IT MAY NOT BE MUCH... BUT IT'S ALL WE'VE GOT!

THE HOURS PASS SLOWLY, WITH EACH TICK OF THE CLOCK SEEMING AN ENDLESS ETERNITY! THEN...

SHE'S GOING TO LIVE! SHE PULLED THROUGH ON WILL POWER ALONE... BUT SHE'S GOING TO MAKE IT!

DOC, IF YOU WERE A GIRL, TO MARRY YOU! WHEN CAN I SEE HER?

IT'LL BE A FEW DAYS! SHE NEEDS REST!

AND, I'LL SEE THAT SHE GETS IT... FROM NOW ON.

A FEW DAYS LATER, THE ROUTINE OF THE HOSPITAL STAFF IS INTERRUPTED FOR A SECOND TIME BY SEVEN COSTUMED FIGURES, AS...

THE REST OF US WANTED TO GIVE YOU TWO SOME PRIVACY, NATASHA... BUT HAWKEYE INSISTED WE COME!

YOU KNOW IT, CAP! I WANNA SHARE MY HAPPINESS WITH THE WHOLE GREAT BIG WONDERFUL WORLD!

HOW'RE YOU FEELIN' TASHA? THE DOC SAYS YOU'LL SOON BE AS GOOD AS NEW!

I... I'M FEELING VERY LUCKY...



THE BEST, LADY! THOUGH, I'VE NEVER FIGURED OUT JUST WHY YOU BECAME A SPY IN THE FIRST PLACE!



"MY HUSBAND ALEXI... OF WHOM I HAVE NEVER BEFORE SPOKEN TO YOU... WAS ONE OF OUR HOMELAND'S MOST FAMED TEST PILOTS! BECAUSE OF HIS EXTRAORDINARY SKILL, HE WAS ASSIGNED TO TEST OUR MOST SECRET... AND MOST DANGEROUS... AIRCRAFT."



"BUT THEN, ONE DAY..."

I MUST INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND ALEXI WAS KILLED TODAY... WHEN HIS EXPERIMENTAL ROCKET EXPLODED!

HOWEVER, YOU WILL BE GLAD TO KNOW HE DIED A HERO... TESTING WEAPONS FOR USE AGAINST OUR ENEMIES!

IF... IF ONLY! COULD DO SOMETHING... TO BE WORTHY OF HIS MEMORY...



NOW, I KNOW THEY LIED... SO THAT ALEXI COULD BE TRAINED TO BE THE RED GUARDIAN, AND I TO BE... THE BLACK WIDOW!

THEY CHANGED HIM SOMEHOW... MADE HIM CRUELLER! HE SEEMED HARDLY THE SAME MAN I ONCE LOVED...

LOOK, TASHA... YOU'D BETTER GET SOME REST.

I SHALL! I ONLY WISH... I WERE FREE TO TELL YOU OF MY MISSION FOR SHIELD!



AND, JUST ONE FINAL THING, NATASHA... LING AND HIS CROWIES SPENT YEARS TRAINING ALEXI... TO BE JUST A SUPER-POWERFUL PUPPET OF THE STATE!

BUT, WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN HIS FEELINGS FOR YOU TRIUMPHED OVER THAT TRAINING... AND HE DIED A MAN!



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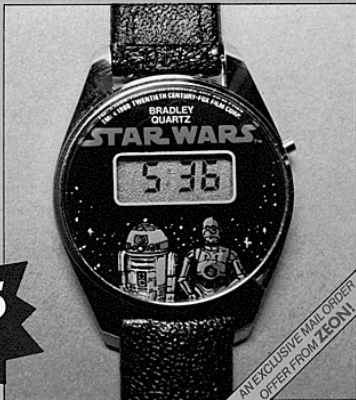
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